Comments on a new film.

Put all the Kennedy assassination theories together and what have you got? Executive Action.

A movie that pretends to portray in fiction the facts behind the death of President Kennedy. The result is the type of artistic endeavor you always find when you involve a committee in anything creative -- a hodge podge.

Here, we have a murky plot involving private citizens (industrialists and oilmen) and retired government officials, that, through their past associations and contacts, can somehow accomplish the following:

1. Successfully forge Secret Service credientials and use them to fool local police.
2. Control the route of a presidential motorcade.
3. Cause the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company circuits to go dead.
4. Create a plot that involves not one but three riflemen - two firing from buildings and one firing from behind a fence. Naturally, they all escape unnoticed after killing the President. I'm not saying these things cannot be done, I am saying that this free lance group, as outlined in this film could not possibly do these things. They haven't the power.

The story includes some momential political naivete when it assumes JFK was a threat because he could, or would, change the 27 1/2% oil depleation allowance -- apparently by fiat, without involving Congress.

At another point, the plotters fear that JFK would lead a revolution to gain rights for blacks and cite this as a reason for his removal. One was left to wonder how these same plotters viewed Johnson's subsequent assistance to the cause of civil rights. Would they now start plotting to kill Johnson?

The chronology of events presented in the movie has a Dallas newspaper printing a map of the November 22nd motorcade route prior to Adlai Stevenson's October 24th visit to Dallas — when, in point of fact, the route was printed on November 19th -- three days before the assassination. One wonders who was responsible for researching this script and if they ever had a grasp of the events.

In another scene we see a Dallas newsboy delivering the morning paper on November 22nd. The paper is wrapped with that notorious "Kennedy Wanted for Treason" handbill. A few of these hand bills were indeed passed out in Dallas that day, however, they were not done so with the co-operation of the Dallas Morning News.

How is it that Oswald got a job in the Texas School Book Depository on the motorcade route on October 15th - three weeks before the route was planned. Executive Action does not confront this problem. It appears that this was just a happy coincidence that assisted the success of this weird plot.

When the fictional assassin in the TSBD finially shoots the President he is shown dropping his rifle beneath the window, for ready discovery. In fact, the rifle was discovered nowhere near the assassination window.

Any plot that hinges, as this one did, on two riflemen gaining access to two buildings, minutes before the motorcade arrives, is a plot that depends for its success upon blind luck. What this plot lacks in sophistication it makes up for in cheap spy thriller dialogue.

This story implies that Oswald was set-up as a scapegoat to take the blame for an assassin firing from his place of employment. Police, apparently, would rush into the building after the shooting and arrest Oswald, while the real assassin slipped away. So far so good. However, in this film there we see a second rifleman (the Records Building) across the way, firing from a building that apparently contained no scapegoat. What if Dallas police had surrounded the second building? Was there a second scapegoat? Was there a third scapegoat on the grassy knoll? The script compounds these problems by missing the point. Or did they conceive a plot involving three Lee Harvey Oswalds hanging around Dealy Plaza that day?

One scene shows an assassination team training on the desert for hours, firing at a target car containing dummies. All this in broad daylight, subject to discovery by passers by who would certainly remember such a bizarre event after an assassination. Plots do not work this way if they hope to escape detection.

This fictional assassination team, for some unexplained reason, was training to accomplish their feat in six or seven seconds. Why not 30 seconds? Is this because an amateur film of the actual assassination taken by Abraham Zapruder showed a six second assassination? Had the fictional assassins already seen the Zapruder film?

Another curious episode involves a scene in which the conspirators review the background of a possible scapegoat for use in Dallas. One member, obviously a CIA type, put on a slide show for the others. He screened slides of documents, that the film's researchers had obtained from the records of the Warren Commission, suggesting as with the Zapruder film, that this plot had reviewed the findings of the Warren Commission before they killed the President.

At best this suggests that the conspirators were as influential as the Warren Commission, in that, they were able to obtain various records from the State Department, CIA and Defense Department in order to select their scapegoat. Just how a high level plot would go about doing this, without exciting the curiosity of the White House escapes me. This plot is not only absurd, it features time jumps common to science fiction literature.

This script seems to depend for its success on the following:

1. That Oswald would somehow order a mail order rifle and pistol. In the story the plotters happily report that, without prompting, Oswald had just ordered a rifle. How fortunate!
2. That the Secret Service would, on this occassion, drive the presidential limousine at no more than 15 mph, thus enabling the assassins to hit their target. Suppose the driver had hit the gas at the first sign of danger? What then?
4. That RFK would be so pre-occupied with grief that he would not want to know who killed his brother. Can anyone believe this?
4. That a later autopsy and bullistics examination wouldn't discover a conspiracy involving three rifles firing three different identifiable missiles. Incredibley, the movie ignores the autopsy.
5. That the government would back away from exposing a plot of this nature. Why would exposure of this Mickey Mouse plot hurt the government?

The single most important flaw in this film is the attempt to explain motive. What did these fictional plotters hope to gain by killing JFK? Did they realize who they were putting in the White House? Could they trust Johnson to assist in their cover-up? Why? And if so, why was there no mention of the Vice-President throughout this assassination pot pouri?

Naturally, this plot, in view of the authors Freed and Lane, would involve the ultra-right. Who else? Thus having established the "right" as the villains, it came as no surprise that at the end the three assassins carefully packed up their weapons, walked out of their sniper's nests, unnoticed, motored out to Dallas's Love Field and boarded a Lufthansa German Airline flight to Europe. Germans, Nazie's...get it?

Alas, the movie ended in a pyroxism of paranoia in attempting to show that witnesses to the event have been systematically eliminated (further assassinations) by this same plot. The number of people who were witnesses to the deaths of JFK, Oswald and Officer Tippit, or who were associated with the investigation of these deaths, numbered in the thousands. Why is it strange that 18 have died "six by gunfire, three in motor accidents, two by suicide, one from a cut throat, one from a karate chop to the neck three from heart attacks and two from natural causes?" Three from heart attacks and two from natural causes? Since when are heart attacks classified as unnatural deaths? Why not list Lyndon Johnson, Robert Ryan and several hundred others who have passed away in the last ten years as long as you are mentioning natural causes?

The recipe for Freed and Lanes' Executive Action, blended for film by screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, consists of the following ingredients:

1 tablespoon of imagination of Mark Lane

1 teaspoon of Professor Josiah Thompson's research

a dash of left-wing catachisms from Donald Freed

2 pounds of dressed up theories by District Attorney Jim Garrison

1 cup of strange deaths by Penn Jones

a double pinch of Professor Popkin's theories

shaker of seasonings by researcher David Lifton

sweetening of PR by Steven S. Jaffee

Mix together and bake until crust is brown. Serve to the gullible and naive on the 10th Anniversary of John Kennedy's death for bad taste.

One final note. In a radio interview producer Edward Lewis commented on his film — a film he bills as "fiction - based on fact." When asked who he thought was involved in the actual assassination, Lewis said, "We don't know who did what to whom." So be it.

FRED T. NEWCOMB
November 20, 1973